

Testimony for Appropriations Committee Budget Hearing – February 19, 2017
Reinstating the funding for CT State Parks Full-time & Seasonal Staff

Senators Formica, Osten, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Pamela Adams and I am the current President of the Friends of Connecticut State Parks (FCSP). Our organization's mission is to support, protect and promote the State Parks. FCSP has 25 member Friends groups and a little more than 6,500 members statewide.

When Governor Malloy gave his budget speech we were very hopeful for the future of the State Parks when he specifically mentioned that the parks would remain be open and be available to all. That hope was short lived when the budget details were released. Last summer, the State parks' seasonal staff budget was cut by 45%. Three campgrounds were closed, park day-use and camping seasons were shortened and many popular programs such as Hammonasset Beach-Meigs Point Nature Center education programs and Gillette Castle Victorian Holidays were reduced or eliminated. This past fall, agencies, including the DEEP, were directed to find an additional 8-10% of reductions. Sadly, this budget proposes to keep those reductions in place and additional cuts will be necessary if municipal cuts and union concessions do not materialize. Under these circumstances closure of additional facilities will be necessary for the sake of public safety.

In 1978, the State Parks system had 258 full-time field staff. Since that time, the state park system has been on a steady 40-year downslide to the present time where the field staff count is a pitiful 70 full-time positions. In this biennial budget, no full time positions lost to retirement will be authorized for refill. By 2020, (within 3 short years), staffing levels are projected to fall to 40 as the older supervisors and maintainers become eligible to retire. This year (2017) there were over 35 vacancies that were not filled and swept, and the DEEP has lost over 200 positions over the past 10 years; and

This past year, CT State Parks System served between 8 and 9 million visitors. The State Parks play a significant role in Connecticut's tourism industry and generate \$1.2 billion in revenues for the state through fees and all of the support businesses throughout Connecticut. The Governor's 2018-2019 budget eliminates the regional Tourism Districts and significantly reduces funding for the State Office of Tourism. Reductions to the State Parks will, without question, drive potential visitors away from our state to neighboring states where State Park and Tourism budgets are set at levels to maintain the State Parks as welcoming facilities and entice visitors to spend their vacation time there, rather than in Connecticut. Continuous cuts to State Parks and Tourism will reduce revenues and tax dollars and will exacerbate an already difficult fiscal situation.

While I know that this is a difficult "ask", please consider stemming the loss of park staff and restore funding for both Full-time and Seasonal staff so that Connecticut's beautiful State Park and Forest Recreation areas can remain open and attractive and safe places to visit.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully,

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